

# *Field Report*

## Whiskeytown National Recreation Area

### ■ 1.0 Summary

The Whiskeytown Unit is part of the Whiskeytown-Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area (NRA). It was established in November 8, 1965 to provide visitors with quality outdoor recreational opportunities and the conservation of scenic and historic values. One of the main attractions to the park is Whiskeytown Lake, with 36 miles of shoreline covering 3,200 acres. The park is open year-round, but visitation is typically highest during summer months (between June and August) and lowest during winter months.

Potential Alternative Transportation System (ATS) options have been identified and summarized as follows:

- **Bus Service to the Park** – The lack of existing transit service to the park limits access for visitors without private automobiles or for persons with disabilities. The potential implementation of a transit system would provide visitors with an alternative to driving. Service could be designed to operate during peak periods such as weekends and summer months. As demand increases, weekday service could be added as needed. Service could operate from Redding and connect with the Redding Area Bus Authority (RABA) system and drop visitors off at the park's Visitor Center. Either RABA or a private operator could be contracted to operate the service with the NPS. The initiation of a user incentive fare program for transit users could be structured to provide free use of the park without payment of the day-use fee. The buses could be equipped with bike racks, storage space for food, camping equipment, supplies, and other items.
- **Park and Ride and Shuttle Bus Service** – Another potentially feasible transportation alternative would be to create a staging area somewhere in Redding that visitors can drive to and park their vehicles, purchase a shuttle bus ticket, and board the shuttle bus to the Unit. A park-and-ride/shuttle bus service in which visitors drive from their origin and park, load their food, supplies, equipment, bikes, etc., on to the shuttle bus for the visit to Whiskeytown would be feasible and cost effective.
- **In-Park Shuttle Service** – An in-park shuttle system can potentially provide internal circulation for park visitors. Visitors can leave their vehicles parked and board any one of the shuttles to visit different sites within the park. This would reduce in-park traffic and congestion. Services can be provided from Brandy Creek and different camp sites nearby to Whiskey Creek and Oak Bottom. The shuttle buses/vans should be equipped with storage space for equipment, food, bikes, camping gear, etc.

- **Whiskeytown Lake Ferry Service** – Since the main attraction of Whiskeytown is its lake and associated water recreation, a seasonal water ferry service may be a feasible addition to the area's transportation system. Services could be provided between Brandy Creek, Oak Bottom, and Whiskey Creek. A private operator, perhaps the current operator that provides boat rentals, could be contracted to run the service for the NPS. An incentive for visitors to leave their private automobiles at their origin (hotel, home) and use the transit system throughout their stay could include a discounted one-pass ticket or one-day pass for riding the transit system. This incentive could include passes for multiple transit services. The feasibility of a water ferry system would need further study including site considerations such as land availability for a docking area, future automobile/pedestrian access policies and issues, and cost-effectiveness and efficiency analysis studies (compared to other alternative transit system components).

Each of the above alternatives could be considered for long-term transportation improvements with a potential five- to 10-year horizon for implementation.

## ■ 2.0 Background Information

### 2.1 Location

The Whiskeytown NRA is located in Shasta County, California, about eight miles west of Redding and I-5. As shown in Figure 1, State Route (SR) 299 runs east-west through the park and provides the main highway access to the area.

Other towns near the park include French Gulch, approximately three miles to the north of the park, and Weaverville, approximately 30 miles to the west on SR-299.

### 2.2 Administration and Classification

The Whiskeytown NRA is under the jurisdiction of the NPS of the U.S. Department of Interior. The superintendent is David Pugh and the chief ranger is Lawrence Carr. The two other park units – Shasta and Trinity – are administered by the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Bureau of Reclamation manages the power and water supply functions of the Whiskeytown dam and reservoir. Approximately 40 miles of paved and unpaved roads within the park boundary are owned and maintained by Shasta County.

The State of California owns and maintains SR-299 and the Crystal Creek Regional Boys Camp, a minimum-security youth penal institution which occupies a 29-acre tract in the northwest section of the park.

**Figure 1. Location of the Whiskeytown-Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area**

## 2.3 Physical Description

The Whiskeytown Lake, with 36 miles of shoreline covering 3,200 acres, is one of the main attractions of the area (see Figure 2). It was created by diverting water through tunnels and penstocks from the Trinity River Basin to the Sacramento River Basin. The back-country is mountainous and offers many hiking, hunting, and camping activities. The most prominent landmark is the Shasta Baldy, which stands at an elevation of 6,209 feet. The Visitor Center and overlook is located off of SR-299, near the eastern entrance to the park on J.F. Kennedy Memorial Drive.

The park headquarters is located less than a mile from the Visitor Center area. There are three main visitation and staging areas – Oak Bottom at the northwestern part of the lake, Whiskey Creek at the northern side of the lake, and Brandy Creek at the southern side of the lake. All three areas are equipped with boat launch facilities. Oak Bottom and Dry Creek have campgrounds with a number of reserved camping spaces. Space can be reserved through the BIOSPHERICS' reservation line using either the telephone or Internet. Recreational vehicle (RV) and trailer camp facilities are also located in Oak Bottom and Brandy Creek. There is also a marina at both Oak Bottom and Brandy Creek.

in which a private operator runs boat rental services. The Tower House Historic District is located in the western end of SR-299 where the remains of historic buildings from the California Gold Rush of 1849 are located.

**Figure 2. Whiskeytown Lake**



## **2.4 Mission and Goals of the Monument**

The mission of the Whiskeytown NRA, as cited in the *Draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*, 1998 (GMP), is to “provide compatible water and land-based recreation in a mountain setting and conserve and interpret scenic, scientific, natural, cultural, and other values for the enjoyment and benefit of present and future generations.” In recent years, with the increased use of the lake and surrounding areas for recreational activities, the mission of the Whiskeytown NRA has taken on more of a recreational focus. The primary goal of the park is to provide visitors with a high-quality recreational experience.

## **2.5 Visitation Levels and Visitor Profile**

Visitation to the Whiskeytown NRA has averaged around 850,000 visitors per year for the past four years. Visitation declined slightly in 1997 because of the institution of a \$5.00 day-use fee at the park’s major lake areas. In 1997, visitation levels were 670,049 and increased to 752,478 in 1998. Visitation levels tend to increase significantly in the hot summer months and in particular, during water drought years. During the drought period between 1986 and 1991, visitation averaged about 1,580,000 visitors per year. Visitor use is heavily concentrated in the lake areas containing developed facilities and amenities (boat launches, etc.). Visitors pay a \$5.00 day-use fee to park their vehicle and use any of the boat launch, swimming, picnic area facilities. The peak season is typically from April to September.

The majority of visitors arrive by private auto or RV. Since this park is popular with water sport and camping activities, many visitors arrive with a vehicle towing either a boat or a

camper. Peak arrival times tend to be between 11:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. A significant number of local visitors arrive at the park after work and leave after dark. In terms of the distribution of visitors, 44 percent (296,932 visitors) visited Brandy Creek, 29 percent (192,734 visitors) visited the visitor/overlook center, and 15 percent (98,604 visitors) visited Oak Bottom. Based on population projections for Shasta County and the State of California, the GMP has estimated that future visitation will increase by two percent per year over the next several years. This projection will result in an annual increase in visitation of 30 to 40 percent by 2013.

A visitor study conducted by the University of Idaho in the summer of 1998 found that 90 percent of park visitors were from California. The average stay was approximately five hours. (A separate visitor use survey conducted in 1985 by Oregon State University found that half of California visitors lived within a radius of 20 miles of the park.) The 1998 visitor study also found that over half of the visitors came to the park with other family members, and that 78 percent had previously visited the Whiskeytown NRA. The 1998 study also found that 88 percent of the visitors spent less than a day at the Whiskeytown NRA, and another seven percent spent anywhere from two to six days. Of the day users, 52 percent reported that they spent from one to four hours while 19 percent said they spent seven or more hours in the park. The visitors cited swimming and sunbathing as the most popular activities, followed by picnicking, motorboating, fishing, and water-skiing.

## ■ 3.0 Existing Conditions, Issues and Concerns

### 3.1 Transportation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

Visitor access to the Whiskeytown NRA is predominantly made by private automobile. Most visitors access the park from the Redding area using I-5 and SR-299. Currently, public transit does not connect from Redding (the largest city closest to the park) to the Whiskeytown NRA. The RABA operates buses on SR-299 with the closest local transit stop approximately four miles from the entrance to the park. RABA has considered operating services to the Whiskeytown NRA but determined that demand would not support a regular fixed-route service. Transportation access is especially important for people without cars who cannot enjoy the outdoor and recreational opportunities that the NRA has to offer. The proposed alternative evaluated and cited in the GMP recommended “the development of a regular bus service between Redding and Whiskeytown as an alternative to the use of the private automobile and to reduce single occupant automobile travel.”

Whiskeytown NRA staff is responsible for 17.65 miles of paved roads, 47.43 miles of unpaved roads, and 15 parking areas. An increasing amount of resources have been focused on the operations and maintenance of these facilities. Furthermore, parking and circulation within the park typically becomes crowded during summer weekends when the weather is warm. Hot summer days and lower water levels at other nearby lakes and reservoirs tend to attract crowds of visitors to Whiskeytown area. The parking areas at Brandy Creek and Oak Bottom sometime operate at capacity during summer weekends.

Large RVs, campers, and automobiles towing boat trailers often cause congestion on roadways leading to the parking and staging areas.

There are no current transit services that distribute visitors within the park. Personal automobiles are the preferred and only choice of mode to get from one side of the lake to the other. Campers and RV users wishing to explore different parts of the lake tend to drive their vehicles and RVs to different destinations within the park. A maximum of 100 campers can be accommodated at the Dry Creek Group Tent Campgrounds. Oak Bottom and Brandy Creek (see Figure 3) also have individual tent and RV campground facilities. There could be a need to efficiently move campers around the park using transit without the use of cars to add to congestion, emission, and circulation problems. There are also safety concerns with turning movements from the access roads of Whiskey Creek, Oak Bottom, and J.F. Kennedy Memorial Drive onto SR-299. Vehicle speeds on SR-299 tend to be fast, and vehicles turning onto SR-299 from the access roads may potentially cause accidents.

### **Brandy Creek Parking Lot**



Currently, there are two miles of paved trails and 43.4 miles of unpaved trails within the park as well as several miles of regional trails in county lands that extend to other recreational facilities in the area. Presently, many of the park trails are not connected with outside trails. There could be a need to develop a regional trail network to encourage trail-based recreational usage. The BLM has also drafted a plan to link public lands north of the park boundary with the Chappie-Shasta Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Area. The Interlakes Special Recreation Management Area, has proposed the development of a staging area to access the OHV area from SR-299. One of the options considered would be to locate this staging area within the park. The GMP has raised the need to evaluate the feasibility and desirability of developing such a facility within the park boundary.

## **3.2 Community Development Conditions, Issues and Concerns**

Limited coordination between the park and its nearby gateway communities related to community development has been established. The GMP has identified the potential to establish cooperative relationships with French Gulch and Shasta which are also historic

communities. Potential opportunities could be explored to link efforts in the Tower House Historic District with other historic preservation efforts in Shasta and French Gulch. The GMP also identified the potential to establish relationships with nearby American Indian tribal groups with specific associations with the park. The GMP cited a need for a strategy to coordinate planning and the provision of resource management and visitor activities with the identified groups. Plans for interagency coordination are also being explored to expand the trail network to link park trails with outside trails.

### **3.3 Natural or Cultural Resource Conditions, Issues and Concerns**

The Whiskeytown NRA, through the GMP and its park newspaper *The Whiskeytown Nugget* has cited the need for watershed restoration. Partnering with Shasta College, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the USFWS, a watershed program called “Fish First” was developed. Its purpose was to develop and demonstrate cost-effective methods to reduce erosion and landslides caused by human activities and to create a water habitat suitable for fish.

Another important natural resource issue is fire protection and management. Hot and dry summers in the area create high potential for wildfires. Recently, law enforcement concerns with arson fires within the park boundary were also addressed. The GMP identified the need to conduct more fire management planning and to establish management zones for fire protection.

As visitation has increased, conflicts between visitors and wildlife have created serious safety concerns. Bear and mountain lion problems have become an increasing concern and have restricted visitor use in recent years. Human contact with bears through either feeding, food, or trash have resulted in two bears killed by rangers in the summer of 1998. More effective bear management strategies as well as the protection of other wildlife and endangered species have been identified in the GMP.

The GMP has also identified the need to restore some of the historic mining sites to their natural conditions. It has cited the need to develop strategies to evaluate, classify, and treat these potential sites. Another important cultural resource need is the preservation of the Tower Historic District and historic resources of special importance to the Wintu Indians. The GMP has also identified the need to provide sufficient curatorial space to display historic articles native to the sites and to ensure progress towards meeting current curatorial standards.

### **3.4 Recreation Conditions, Issues and Concerns**

A critical concern for the area considers the effect of recreational power boating on the environment in terms of water pollution, noise, and conflict with park visitor activities. The 1998 Visitor Study found that the majority of visitors cited personal watercraft and poor boating safety and etiquette as their main concern. The park is considering limiting or eliminating the use of personal power boats on the lake to reduce such conflicts. Although the park has traditionally provided opportunities for water-based recreation,

plans have been initiated to increase visitor awareness of many land base recreational opportunities such as backcountry hiking, trails, as well as other cultural and natural resources.

## ■ 4.0 Planning and Coordination

### 4.1 Unit Plans

Public Law 95-625 requires an up-to-date GMP for each park unit of the NPS to address planning issues and alternatives for a 15-year planning period. The Whiskeytown NRA recently completed its GMP review and comments period. The GMP's proposed alternative recommended a diversified recreation and interpretation program. It emphasized quality visitor experience of natural and cultural resources of the park, in a setting that offers an opportunity to escape the noise and crowding associated with urban/suburban environments. Water-oriented recreational uses emphasized low-impact activities such as sailing, canoeing, and fishing. Increased emphasis will be placed on visitor enjoyment of backcountry activities and the enjoyment of natural and cultural resources such as Gold Rush history, archeology, Wintu indigenous culture, watershed restoration, threatened and endangered species, and fire management. Finally, staff resources will be focused on increasing the educational and interpretive functions of these focuses.

### 4.2 Public and Agency Coordination

As part of the Interlakes Special Recreation Management Area proposal, the park is evaluating the feasibility and desirability of developing a staging area to access the OHV area from SR-299. Such a facility within the park boundary would require planning and coordination between the NPS and BLM. Shasta County is also encouraging the development of a trail network that would link park trails with regional trails. There is also a potential for extending trails along Clear Creek below the dam and beyond the park boundary to connect with other trails and public roads. This plan will require the park to work with county, state, and other federal lands recreational planners to develop an interconnected regional trail network.

## ■ 5.0 Assessment of Need

### 5.1 Magnitude of Need

ATS at the Whiskeytown NRA could consider both short-term (zero to five years) and long-term (five to 10 years) needs. Since visitation will increase by about two percent annually, the park needs to reasonably manage short-term transportation impacts to the site. If the park decides to restrict or eliminate the use of motorized watercraft, visitation

levels may be negatively affected in the short term. At the very least, decreases in boat trailers coming to the park would potentially free up more parking spaces for other non-boating visitors.

Since there remains adequate parking capacity throughout the park (occasional overflow parking conditions occur during a few crowded days), park staff could implement demand management strategies. These strategies, such as improved road signage and posted rangers to warn arriving visitors of crowded parking conditions, could be used to alleviate the problem in the short term. Moreover, since visitation peaks during the summer and drop off drastically in other times of the year, visitor demand would not be sufficient to justify a permanent year-round transit system. Therefore, some combination of demand management strategies (parking management, posted rangers, and improved signage) would work in the short term and reduce the need for an ATS.

For the long term, five to 10 years, however, there could be the need for an ATS. As the population of Shasta County increases and outdoor recreation becomes more popular, the augmentation of existing demand management strategies with ATS could be considered to address parking, access, and circulation issues in the park. Over the next 15 years, the GMP has estimated that visitation will increase by 30 to 40 percent (to over 1,000,000 annual visitors).

## **5.2 Feasible Alternatives**

Three feasible long-term ATS strategies should be evaluated for the Whiskeytown NRA including:

- A bus service providing transit access from Redding to the park;
- A park-and-ride facility allowing visitors to drive, park, and ride a shuttle bus to the park;
- An in-park shuttle system that provides internal circulation for visitors; and
- A water ferry service providing internal park circulation between major lakeside destinations.

Each potential ATS strategy is presented below.

- **Bus Service to the Park** – The lack of existing transit service to the park limits access for potential visitors without private automobiles or for persons with disabilities. The potential implementation of a transit system could provide visitors with an alternative to driving. Service could be designed to operate during peak periods such as weekends and summer months. As demand increases, weekday service could be added as needed. Service could operate from Redding and connect with the RABA system and drop visitors off at the park's Visitor Center. Either RABA or a private operator could be contracted to operate the service for the NPS. The initiation of a user incentive fare program for transit users could be structured to provide free use of the park without

payment of the day-use fee. The buses could be equipped with bike racks, storage space for food, camping equipment, supplies, and other items.

- **Park and Ride and Shuttle Bus Service** – Another potentially feasible transportation alternative would be to create a staging area somewhere in Redding where visitors could drive to and park their vehicles, purchase a shuttle bus ticket, and board the bus. The buses would be equipped with storage space and bike racks for food, supplies, equipment, bikes, etc. A suitable park and ride staging area would need to be created to make this strategy work. Both the bus access and park-and-ride alternatives would meet the GMP’s needs of calling for “the development of a regular bus service between Redding and Whiskeytown as an alternative to the use of the private automobile and to reduce single occupant automobile travel.”
- **In-Park Shuttle Service** – An in-park shuttle system can potentially provide internal circulation for park visitors. Visitors can leave their vehicles parked and board any one of the shuttles to visit different sites within the park. This would reduce in-park traffic and congestion. Services can be provided from Brandy Creek and different camp sites nearby to Whiskey Creek and Oak Bottom. The shuttle buses/vans should be equipped with storage space for equipment, food, bikes, camping gear, etc.
- **Whiskeytown Lake Ferry Service** – Waterborne transit systems can provide economical and pleasant travel through lakes and rivers. At some NPS units, such as the Glen Canyon NRA, marine vessels are the primary mode of transportation for visitors. Various types of such vessel technologies currently operate worldwide. Since the main attraction of Whiskeytown is its lake and associated water recreation, a seasonal water ferry service could be feasible as an addition to the area’s transportation system. Services could be provided between Brandy Creek, Oak Bottom, and Whiskey Creek. A private operator, perhaps the current operator, could be contracted to run the service for the NPS. Vessel size will depend on many factors such as desired headways, crowding policies, demand, and operating characteristics. The potential vessel type used would most likely be a mono-hull or conventional displacement vessel with open decks for visitors to enjoy the outdoor scenery and room to store camping equipment and bicycles, etc. An incentive for visitors to take transit throughout their stay at the park could include discounted one-day ticket or one-day pass for the intermodal transit system. This incentive could include passes for multiple transit services including the bus system, water ferry service, or a combination of services. A ferry system of this type would still allow many visitors to enjoy the natural scenery of the lake if the use of motor boats are banned in the future. Moreover, a privately operated ferry service would allow the park to regulate its operations without having to run the system. The feasibility of a water ferry system would need further study.

## ■ 6.0 Bibliography

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## ■ 7.0 Persons Interviewed

David Pugh, Superintendent, Whiskeytown National Recreation Area

Lawrence Carr, Chief Ranger, Whiskeytown National Recreation Area